



# JASWELL'S FARM

50 Swan Road  
Smithfield, R.I. 02917  
(401) 231-9043 • Fax (401) 231-9587

USDA Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns  
Farm Bill  
1400 Independence Avenue  
Washington, DC 20250-3355

October 13, 2005

Dear Secretary Johanns:

Enclosed please find our response to the request for opinion on the upcoming 2007 Farm Bill. Unfortunately, due to the timing of our current season, we were unable to attend the forum being held at the URI campus in Friday, October 14<sup>th</sup>.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to offer our suggestions and would be happy to discuss our responses in further detail if needed. Please feel free to contact at any time (401) 231-9043 or through our website [www.jaswellsfarm.com](http://www.jaswellsfarm.com).

Thank you again.

Sincerely:

Allison Jaswell Molis  
Jaswell's Farm  
Smithfield, RI



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Jaswell's Farm was started by Nicholas Jaswell (Nicola Gesualdi) in 1899. Primarily focusing on wholesale agriculture, Nicholas transferred ownership of the farm to his son Joseph in the late 1930's. Joe continued his father's tradition of wholesale and commercial growing. Being profoundly deaf, he was limited to participating in certain markets due to the prejudices that existed at that time. When Joe's son Richard was 16, he took over the day-to-day business operations of the farm. Seeing the need for additional income, Richard began to explore the ideas of direct marketing and diversity of product. He eventually did away with the animals that were left on the farm, choosing not to replace them after they had expired and started planting more profitable crops like sweet corn and summer vegetables. He and Joe also planted many more apple and pear trees to increase their orchard size.

In 1967, Richard married Patricia Maguire and they embarked on a journey that has led the farm to where it is today. In 1969, they opened their first retail store and started selling the majority of their products directly to their customers. They were one of the first apple orchards in the area to offer "pick your own" apples to their customers. In 1970, Pat and Richard purchased their first cider press to make use of the extra apples that weren't sold and the windfalls. As demand for their products increased, so did the size of their operation. The Jaswells purchased a larger cider press to accommodate their growing wholesale customer base and started planting more pick your own products like berries and pumpkins. In the mid 1990's while their two children were in college, they realized the business was growing beyond their expectations and they needed to grow with it. After their children decided they would continue the family farm and growing business, they made the decision to build a larger store, brand new cider mill, and start pasteurizing the apple cider. They also decided to start a small bakery to add to the new farmstand. This enabled the Jaswells to scale back the wholesale business and focus more on their retail consumers.

In 1999, almost 100 years after Jaswell's Farm was started, Pat and Richard's two children took over the business. Chris and Allison are trying to continue the proud family tradition that was started so long ago by an Italian immigrant who dreamed of being successful in America. After witnessing some of the prejudice and poverty Joe endured during his ownership, Chris and Allison saw their parents' sheer determination and hard work build a successful and thriving agri-business. Continuing the path laid by their parents, Chris and Allison focus on their retail consumers and have joined the trend into agri-tourism. They now hope to continue through a fifth generation as Allison's son is now experiencing his first year of farm life.



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Jaswell's Farm is a fourth generation family farm located in the heart of Smithfield's "Apple Valley." We grow a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and offer pick your own on many of our products. In addition to producing and pasteurizing our famous and award winning apple cider, we have a farmstand and bakery on-site. Our farmstand and bakery offer the freshest picked seasonal fruits and vegetables as well as a delectable assortment of fresh baked goods. We carry a complete line of preserves, jellies, salad dressings, prepackaged baking mixes, Vermont cheeses, RI honey, candy, fudge and so much more. Fruit & gift baskets can be ordered at almost any time and specialty items such as gourmet apples are available for almost any occasion. Special orders are accepted throughout the season for a variety of items. Our farmstand and bakery is open daily 8AM – 5PM from Mid May to December 24th. Our holiday hours vary by season.

## SCHEDULE OF SEASONS:

Asparagus.....	Mid May – Early July
Spring Plants & Flowers.....	Mid May – Late June
Strawberries*.....	Mid June – Early July
Raspberries*.....	Early July – Early October
Blueberries*.....	Early July – Early September
Seasonal Fruits & Veggies.....	Mid June – Late December
Apples*.....	Early September – Late December
Pumpkins*.....	Mid September – Late October
Fresh Cut Christmas Trees.....	Late November – Late December
Gourmet Chocolate Apples**....	Early September – Late December
Fruit & Specialty Baskets**.....	Mid May - Late December

***\*Denotes Pick Your Own***

***\*\* Special orders available at other times of the year***



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## **1. Challenges for New Farmers:**

The biggest challenge is the threat of urban encroachment. As the areas surrounding existing farms are developed into neighborhoods, farms continue to require pesticide application, irrigation and other activities that active agriculture engages in. Although new neighbors can mean new customers, it can also mean trouble with local, state and federal offices as the neighbors start to complain about day-to-day activities. An active farm requires the ability to perform their activities in a timely and unobtrusive manner. Most have good working relationships with those who are on their borders, but new people may not be used to the operation. An active farm typically need to irrigate, apply pesticides, and truck product in or out. All of this can mean loud equipment, depletion of water resources, traffic concerns, tractor-trailer frequency and much more. Those who are new to area may not be aware of what goes into keeping a farm attractive and well maintained and may not appreciate it. In RI, we have great protection through some of our local ordinances and state laws. It would be extremely beneficial to gather support on a federal level as well. Without that support as the surrounding areas change, urban encroachment can make it difficult for future generations to continue. Our farm is located in the heart of "Apple Valley" where eight orchards once thrived, currently we are one of two still active while the third has entered into a purchase and sales agreement with a large developer. We maintain all of our proper licensing and are sure to perform excellent agricultural practice, however this could be devastating to our business and livelihood. As the social environment changes and evolves, it becomes less conducive for agriculture. If farming becomes known as a difficult industry to enter into or maintain, it is sure to discourage existing farms to continue and may deter those who wish to start new.

## **2. Competitiveness:**

Subsidies and incentives for more products grown could prove Beneficial. The expenses that are encountered from seed to harvest can significantly affect the consumer's cost for products. Therefore it makes it difficult to compete with countries whose expenses may be less. If more programs are designed to offer incentives or subsidized funding, it may allow US growers to become more competitive in the market as a whole. It may also be sensible to concentrate on limiting produce from outside the



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country when possible. If regulations on imported produce were stricter we would not have a large influx of varying prices.

### **3. Farm Program Benefits:**

As a small grower in a small state, it's difficult to determine if distribution is fair. The programs that we participate in and individuals with whom we encounter provide us with the necessary support and information. Our local USDA agents are extremely knowledgeable about the programs offered and are fantastic about notification. However, it is important that the programs be applicable to the farms and areas in which they are offered. As previously mentioned, a major issue in RI is the lack of land. If other areas of the country are not as affected by this issue, programs should be developed that would be applicable to their needs. A common sense approach would be the relativity of the program to the farm.

### **4. Conservation Goals:**

The primary need for conservation is our most basic necessity...land. Due to the real estate market being what it is, it is becoming increasingly difficult to "hold out" from development. If there are no farms left, there will be no need for agricultural conservation issues. If federal funding were made available for development rights, the combined efforts of the local, state, and federal governments may allow the financial compensation to be closer to the real estate value of the properties and more farms would be able to enter the program. There needs to be a strong and concentrated effort to protect the farms that are still left and actively engaged in agriculture. Too often, the participants in the development rights programs are trusts or historical sites and not active farms. All parcels of land are important to protect, however it is more likely that a struggling family farm will succumb to the financial benefit of development rather than a historical location. We have so few active farms left, it's crucial to protect what we have.

### **5. Rural Economic Growth:**

Once again relativity is key as well as notification. Programs should be applicable to the area in which they are used. Different areas of the country have different needs based on climate and weather conditions as



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well as necessity of the product grown or tended to. It's difficult to blanket the programs to benefit the entire country.

## **6. Expansion of Ag Products, Markets, and Research:**

We need more promotion of direct marketers. Commercial agriculture garners a tremendous amount of support from national organizations as well as national supermarkets. The local growers who cater to their own consumers direct need more exposure. We have a great effort by some of our local and state agencies in RI, but a national campaign would be beneficial. If grants or low and no interest loans were available, those of us operating in smaller capacities might be able to do more advertising and make improvements to our farms to promote agriculture. The financial support would also enable us to acquire pieces of land that surround or abut our property to expand our growing area. On a personal note, we would live to purchase the farm net to us that is soon to be developed, but would never be able to afford the asking price. If given the necessary funding, we would be able to preserve more open space in our area as well as utilize it for growing produce.

We would also like to make a request. Although we sincerely appreciate the request of our input to the issues at hand, we were unable to attend the meeting due to the time of year. If possible, plan the meeting for a farmer's off-season. This would enable a wider diversity of input on a national level. Thank you for your time.

Chris J. Jaswell  
Jaswell's Farm  
Smithfield, RI

Allison J. Molis  
Jaswell's Farm  
Smithfield, RI

Jaswells Farm, LLC  
50 Swan Road  
Smithfield, RI 02917-1607

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SECRETARY, USDA

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Farm Bill  
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